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--4. (Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the shielding atmosphere is formed by a gas mixture consisting of argon with a content greater than or equal to 70% by volume and of 0.1 to 30% by volume of several additional compounds chosen from  $H_2$ ,  $O_2$ ,  $CO_2$  and  $N_2$ , preferably a mixture of argon,  $O_2$  and  $CO_2$ .--

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--5. (Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the shielding atmosphere is formed by a gas mixture consisting of helium with a content greater than or equal to 70% by volume and of at least one additional compound chosen from  $H_2$ ,  $O_2$ ,  $CO_2$  and  $N_2$  with a content of 0.1 to 30% by volume, preferably a gas mixture consisting of helium with a content greater than or equal to 70% by volume and of 0.1 to 30% by volume of an additional compound chosen from  $H_2$ ,  $O_2$ ,  $CO_2$  and  $N_2$ .--

--6. (Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the shielding atmosphere is formed by a gas mixture consisting of helium with a content greater than or equal to 70% by volume and of 0.1 to 30% by volume of several additional compounds chosen from  $H_2$ ,  $O_2$ ,  $CO_2$  and  $N_2$ , preferably a mixture of helium,  $O_2$  and  $CO_2$  and furthermore possibly containing  $H_2$ .--

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--7.(Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the shielding atmosphere is formed by a gas mixture consisting of at least 70% by volume of helium and argon and of 0.1 to 30% by volume of at least one additional compound chosen from H<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub> and N<sub>2</sub>, preferably a gas mixture consisting of 0.1% to 69.9% by volume of helium, of 0.1% to 69.9% by volume of argon and of 0.1 to 30% by volume of at least one additional compound chosen from H<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub> and N<sub>2</sub>, the sum of the argon and helium contents being at least 70% of the total volume of the mixture.--

--8.(Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the workpiece or workpieces to be welded are made of a metal or a metal alloy chosen from coated or uncoated steels, particularly assembly steels, HLES steels, carbon steels, steels having a layer of zinc alloy on the surface, stainless steels, aluminum or aluminum alloys and high yield point steels.--

--9.(Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the shielding atmosphere is formed by a gas mixture consisting of at least 70% by volume of helium and/or argon and of 0.1 to 30% by volume of at least one additional

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compound chosen from  $O_2$  and  $CO_2$  and wherein the workpiece or workpieces to be welded are made of steel, especially carbon steel.--

--10.(Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the shielding atmosphere is formed by a gas mixture consisting of at least 70% by volume of helium, of 0.1 to 30% by volume of hydrogen and of 0 to 29.9% by volume of at least one additional compound chosen from  $O_2$  and  $CO_2$ , and wherein the workpiece or workpieces to be welded are made of stainless steel.--

--11.(Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the shielding atmosphere is formed by a gas mixture consisting of at least 90% by volume of helium or of argon and of 0.1 to 10% by volume of at least one additional compound chosen from  $O_2$  and  $CO_2$ , and wherein the workpiece or workpieces to be welded are made of aluminum, preferably of at least 96% by volume of helium or argon and of 0.1 to 4% by volume of at least one additional compound chosen from  $O_2$  and  $CO_2$ .--

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--12.(Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the shielding atmosphere is formed by a gas mixture consisting of at least 85% by volume of helium or of argon and of 0.1 to 15% by volume of  $H_2$ , and wherein the workpiece or workpieces to be welded are made of stainless steel, preferably of at least 90% by volume of helium or argon and of 0.1 to 10% by volume of  $H_2$ .--

At  
and

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--13.(Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the shielding atmosphere is formed by a gas mixture consisting of at least 70% by volume of helium and/or argon and of 0.1 to 30% by volume of  $N_2$ , and wherein the workpiece or workpieces to be welded are made of steel, preferably of at least 80% by volume of helium and/or argon and the balance being  $N_2$ .--

--14.(Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the shielding atmosphere is formed by a gas mixture consisting of at least 85% by volume of helium and/or argon and of 0.1 to 15% by volume of  $H_2$  and  $CO_2$ , and wherein the workpiece or workpieces to be welded are made of stainless steel.--

--15. (Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the laser beam is emitted by an Nd:YAG or CO<sub>2</sub> laser and/or wherein the electric arc is a plasma arc.--

*Sub 135*  
--16. (Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the electric arc is delivered by a plasma-arc torch and preferably the laser beam and said arc are delivered by a single welding head.--

*Sub 135*  
--17. (Amended) The welding process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the electrode is consumable or not consumable.--

--18. (Amended) Use of a welding process as claimed in claim 1 for welding at least one tailored blank intended to constitute at least one part of a vehicle body element.--

*Sub 135*  
--19. (Amended) Use of a welding process as claimed in claim 1 for joining together, by welding, metal workpieces having different thicknesses, particularly tailored blanks.--

--20. (Amended) Use of a welding process as claimed in claim 1 for joining together, by welding, metal workpieces having the same or different thicknesses and having different

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metallurgical compositions or metallurgical grades, particularly tailored blanks.--

--21. (Amended) Use of a welding process as claim in claim 1 for joining together, by welding, the two longitudinal edges of a pre-tube.--

Claims 3-21 have been amended to correct multiple dependency. Attached hereto is a marked-up version of the changes made to the specification by the current amendment. The attached page is captioned "VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE".

Respectfully submitted,

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